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USDA RELEASES OFFICIAL ANIMAL DISEASE TRACEABILITY BUSINESS PLAN

WASHINGTON, Sept. 24, 2008--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today released the official version of its *Business Plan to Advance Animal Disease Traceability*. The plan provides benchmarks to guide the National Animal Identification System's progress towards the long-term goal of 48-hour traceback of affected or exposed animals in the event of an animal disease outbreak.

The National Animal Identification System (NAIS) is a modern, streamlined information system that helps producers and animal health officials respond quickly and effectively to events affecting animal health in the United States. NAIS utilizes premises registration, animal identification and animal tracing components to both locate potentially diseased animals and release animals from disease suspicion. It is a state-federal-industry partnership, which is voluntary at the federal level.

"Rapid and effective animal disease containment is necessary to protect U.S. animal health and marketability," said Bruce Knight, under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs. "Traceability, or the access to accurate identification information, locations and movement points for suspect and exposed animals, is the key to determine the source and extent of a disease outbreak. The *Business Plan to Advance Animal Disease Traceability* will assist us as we work to provide a greater level of protection for our nation's animal agricultural community."

The business plan provides USDA, its partners and the public with realistic approaches and goals that have the support needed to successfully increase the level of animal traceability for disease response and control capabilities in the United States. It also takes a comprehensive look at the country's current traceability status, including a breakdown by species and details seven strategies that will provide the greatest amount of traceability progress where it is needed the most. These strategies involve state and federally regulated and voluntary animal health programs--one of the plan's priorities is to integrate NAIS standards in existing disease programs to makes the most out of current disease control activities.

Strategies also provide opportunities for producers to use the same identification methods for industry-administered animal management and marketing programs. Such approaches ensure producers cost effective livestock identification solutions to achieve their management and business objectives. Likewise, the 840 identification tags used in NAIS enables producers to easily provide information on origin of their livestock to packers. In turn, packers can rely on this information for their origin claims on products, in accordance with country of origin labeling (COOL).

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USDA incorporated public comment into the official version of the plan and will periodically review and update the plan as needed to leverage new opportunities, address unforeseen challenges and maintain progress towards the ultimate goal of 48-hour traceback. The official version replaces the draft published in December 2007.

Progress is already being made. USDA has approved twenty 840 identification devices providing producers with both visual and electronic identification options for participation in the animal identification component of NAIS.

USDA is also making progress on integrating NAIS data standards and automatic data capture technology into program disease work. In the ongoing bovine tuberculosis (TB) investigation taking place in California, the taskforces have tagged more than 250,000 head with RFID 840 tags. The animal identification number encoded in each tag can easily be read with an electronic reader as each animal is tested and then automatically transferred with the test records to the information system. The handheld computers and electronic eartags makes the testing of the cattle less time consuming for the producer and animal health officials while eliminating manual written test sheets as well as the labor intensive data entry and associated errors.

Notice of this action was published in the Sept. 23 *Federal Register*.

For more information on NAIS, go to www.usda.gov/nais.

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